

# What is shared in Shared Bikes?: Mobility, Space, and Capital

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Department of Public Policy  
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## Abstract

In the 2010s, bike-sharing became the new trend worldwide. This article seeks to complicate our understanding of bike-sharing that is conventionally associated with environmental protection and sustainable growth by investigating the rise of dockless bike-sharing in urban China. Drawing on mobilities studies and long-term fieldwork, this ethnography unpacks the complex politico-economic, spatial-infrastructure, and social entanglement that contextualizes this reincarnated form of pedaled mobility. China had in the previous two decades been eager to shed its image of a bicycle kingdom and enthusiastically embrace private cars. Rapid urbanization has produced a spatial-infrastructure order that has marginalized bike-centric infrastructures and movements. The promise of carefree mobility with the bike-share programs, which are shaped by marketing strategies common in the gig economy, takes advantage of an ambiguous perception of public space and transforms it. Yet, despite the convergence of experience expressed in the articulation of 'convenience,' this new form of mobility is embedded in different kinds of socio-economic realities and spatial imaginations of connectedness for different social groups. The capitalization of such conveniences in these bike-sharing schemes, which is enabled by imagining a technological fix of a spatial-social issue, seems to reproduce rather than disrupt the existing social hierarchy.

## Biography

Jun ZHANG is an assistant professor at City University of Hong Kong. Her works explore social transformation through urban governance, infrastructure and the built environment, space and mobility, and class politics, with a regional focus on China. Her first book, "Driving toward Modernity: Cars and the Lives of the Middle Class in Contemporary China" (Cornell University Press, 2019), takes the entangled rises of an automotive regime and the middle class as a way to examine the transformations under the grand narrative of China in the reform era.

# All are welcome!

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